

Crawl, walk, run relevance

It's not your platoon sgt.'s PLDC

By Dave Crozier

General Douglas MacArthur once said, "We are bound no longer by the straitjacket of the past and nowhere is the change greater than in our profession of arms. What, you may well ask, will be the end of all of this? I would not know! But I would hope that our beloved country will drink deep from the chalice of courage."

Even though he was talking about another time, his words ring true today especially when looking at the Global War on Terror and how the Army has had to adapt to a new form of warfare.

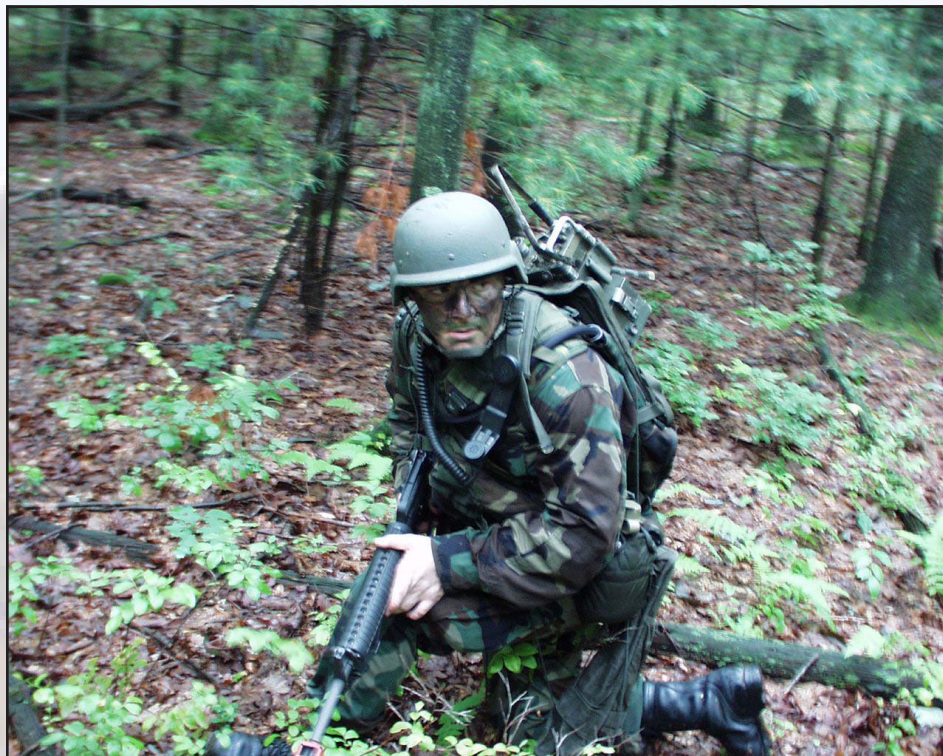
More than 2,400 years ago, another general had some profound thoughts on the profession of arms. Chinese General Sun Tsu, who wrote *The Art of War* noted, "The general who wins the battle makes many calculations in his temple before the battle is fought. The general who loses makes but few calculations beforehand."

Together these quotes have profound context and could be construed as the basis for how the Army has looked at its Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC). And in some ways it has.

Taking into account today's battlefield and the Global War on Terror the Army leadership quickly realized that current doctrine and training wasn't up to the task of dealing with this new asymmetrical war. Because of that, Army leadership directed that all training must become relevant and incorporate the lessons learned in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

For PLDC that means what your platoon sergeant learned several years ago wouldn't cut it on today's battlefield, hence, changes in curriculum had to happen, and they had to happen fast.

To effect that change, the Army's leadership turned to the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas. The folks in the Directorate of Training and Doctrine (DOTD) led that change, DOTD turned to Sgt. Maj. Victor LeGloahec, PLDC Chief for the directorate. In five short months, January through May, LeGloahec and the PLDC team molded today's PLDC into something that even yesterday's squad leaders wouldn't recognize.



U.S. Army photo

A Soldier at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa., goes through training at the Primary Leadership Development Course taught by the 3rd Battalion 166th Regiment NCO Academy. The Academy is the only Reserve Component unit to try the 96-hour STX and is now in the process of finding ways to keep it in their course curriculum.

"I don't know if everyone saw the editorial in the *Army Times* from that Soldier who wrote that an Army at War needs a revamped PLDC, but I wish I could get him to go through PLDC again," LeGloahec said. "He obviously [attended the course some time ago]."

PLDC has gone through two major changes over the past three years; the first was in October 2002 when PLDC became more tactical.

"The days of having your infantry company guard your Tactical Operations Center went away in 2002 because we didn't have the manpower," he said. "So more tactical lessons were thrown into PLDC to compensate for that change. It's the same for today. Now we are doing a 96-hour Situational Training Exercise (STX) where you spend that entire time in the field rather than the old 24-to 30-hour STX."

LeGloahec said, the main point of the 96-hour STX is to give the Soldiers more time to practice their troop-leading procedures, work on mission planning and to execute the



U.S. Army photo

Classroom instruction remains an integral part of the PLDC experience. Soldiers learn about a variety of subjects including leadership, counseling, Army writing style, NCO Evaluation Reports, risk management, planning and troop-leading procedures. Above, a Soldier attending the Fort Bliss PLDC takes an open-book test.

mission in the field instead of just being taught how to do them in the classroom and then going straight to an evaluation – go, no go – phase of the instruction.

He said that the Army uses the crawl, walk and run-method of instruction and what was taking place with the old PLDC was that the Soldiers were getting the classroom (crawl) time possibly followed by practical exercises (walk) right outside their classroom in the cantonment area and then it was straight to the STX and evaluation (run).

“It is really not a good way of doing things. So what we have now with the 96-hour STX is that you still have the crawl portion, which is the classroom instruction where they are exposed to it. Then they go to the STX, where each Soldier serves as a squad leader and do a mission (the walk portion),” he said. “They have to go through their troop-leading procedures, and they have to execute the mission. The only difference is that it is a rehearsal, and they can learn from their mistakes.”

This walk phase also allows the small-group leaders (SGLs) the opportunity to take immediate corrective action, thus everyone in the platoon benefits from the instruction and has time to make adjustments when they take the squad-leader role.

“So by the time they go to the evaluation (run) part of the STX, it really clicks because the Soldiers have done it once before,” LeGloahec said. “With the old course, they didn’t get the chance to rehearse it in the field. The Soldiers like the new way of doing things.”

LeGloahec qualified that by relaying his experiences of watching the Soldiers go through the new course at Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania and at the 7th Army Training Command in Germany.

“I have actually observed PLDC training, and the students were absolutely thrilled. I mean it is just a huge difference; I call it the confidence they’ve got,” he said. “You have to remember that the majority of the Army is not combat arms and have never been exposed to this and by the time they get to their evaluations, they are cooking because they got the chance to rehearse it.”

The PLDC format changed in August 2004 after the Army Chief of Staff said that the training needed to become relevant. In January, the new course began its validation phase at Forts Campbell, Ky.; Benning, Ga.; Bliss, Texas; Indiantown Gap, Pa.; and 7th ATC in Germany. By May 1, LeGloahec said, the active component received the go ahead to implement the new course.

Under the new course, LeGloahec noted, there is a major emphasis on troop-leading procedures, planning and the team concept. Now, during the STX, Soldiers have to react to an ambush while mounted and dismounted, react to an improvised explosive device (IED), perform medical evacuation procedures, call in for fire, combat reports, send spot reports, send SALUTE reports and other tasks that they didn’t do before.

“I have talked to junior leaders in the field, and they can tell the difference in the confidence levels of Soldiers going through the new PLDC as compared to the old one. [Confidence



U.S. Army photo

The most common reason for not completing PLDC is a Soldier’s inability to meet the height, weight and Army Physical Fitness Test standards. All Soldiers are required to pass the APFT before they graduate.



U.S. Army photo

While participating in the 96-hour STX Soldiers are faced with many tasks they must perform including casualty evacuation, react to an improvised explosive device, react to ambush and more. Above, Soldiers attending the Fort Bliss PLDC evacuate a wounded Soldier.

is shown in] the way the Soldiers act; the difference in the way they execute,” he said. “It basically comes from the troop-leading procedures being hammered home, the rehearsals, the sand tables, the planning, backwards planning and anything those Soldiers had to execute during the STX; they have got it down pat.”

“PLDC doesn’t make them the best Soldiers in the field, but it does make them better than those who have not gone through the course and the students have confirmed that themselves,” LeGloahec said.

“Every single student that I talked to, across the board, every student has said, ‘I learned something. I was challenged,’” LeGloahec said. “And that’s a big plus.”

At the Fort Bliss NCO Academy which has already gone through two iterations of the new PLDC, the results are also overwhelmingly positive.

“When we are out in the field, I ask the students, ‘are you learning anything? What have you learned?’ And what some of the veterans, mainly, are telling us is that this is exactly what they are doing over in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Sgt. 1st Class Scott Pinkham, PLDC chief. “For what the Army mission is right now, PLDC is totally

relevant. Our SGLs are seeing the more time we have to train as being exactly what we needed. Before we had the expanded STX, the Soldiers were going straight to evaluation from the classroom and getting dinged left and right. Now the Soldiers are tracking because they have had time to [rehearse it in the field]. They really like the new STX.”

Pinkham noted that at Fort Bliss he sees a lot of non-combat arms Soldiers coming to PLDC, which actually works to the Soldier’s benefit.

“They come in here kind of blind so to say and they walk away loving what they have done, what they have learned because it is something they haven’t done before,” Pinkham said.

The expanded STX also allows each Soldier to practice his or her leadership roles.

“It is working better for the simple fact that they are having more time to rehearse, getting more time to plan, do their sand tables; all the things they need to

do as a leader,” he said. “They are not going from the crawl phase straight to running. There is a walk phase in between, and it really works to their benefit come evaluation time.”



U.S. Army photo

Providing realistic scenarios is always a challenge in a training environment. The new PLDC is no different, however, Soldiers have remarked favorably on the realism of the training they receive.

At Fort Indiantown Gap and the rest of the Reserve Component, however, the full implementation of the 96-hour STX will have to wait until the RC can get approval to modify its standard 15-day PLDC course to incorporate the additional field time.

“What we are looking at right now is each part of the course to see what we can cut or change because we want to keep the 96-hour STX,” said Master Sgt. Steve Pachini, PLDC chief for the 3rd Battalion, 166th Regiment. He added that there may be a possibility of doing some of the course requirements online that could open up needed schedule time.

Soldiers’ experiences at Fort Indiantown Gap are similar to those at Fort Bliss, and Pachini agreed that the Soldiers like the new PLDC. He sees more of a team effort during the STX because of the Soldiers’ ability to rehearse.

“They learn from each other and by the time they get the evaluation, they really get it,” he said. “What you usually find with Soldiers at this level is they try and do everything by themselves, not utilize their team leaders and other Soldiers to carry out other missions. With the emphasis here being on troop-leading procedures you see a big difference.”

Command Sgt. Maj. James Vail, commandant of the Fort Indiantown Gap NCO Academy, said he hopes that they can get back to the 96-hour STX soon and the biggest frustration he hears from the Soldiers and the SGLs is that they would have been better prepared for what they faced in Iraq and Afghanistan had they been through the PLDC course prior to deploying.

“They make the comment that they would have benefited from this training, so our hope is that we are going to make this course more relevant,” Vail said. “By doing that, Soldiers will go back and talk it up at their units. Commanders are going to be more informed as to what is going on here and be more willing to send Soldiers to PLDC at the right time before they deploy. The seats are out there. We have just got to get the commanders and first sergeants to push PLDC early.”

While the academies and chief instructors can tout the expanded STX effectiveness and acceptance by the Soldiers, no one says it better than the Soldiers themselves.

“I learned a lot,” said Spc. Joseph Vidal, a unit supply specialist at USASMA who has been in the Army two and a half years and graduated from the second cycle of PLDC at Fort Bliss with the new 96-hour STX. “The SGLs really know their stuff, and the STX was good.”

“It was good. The classroom stuff dragged out sometimes, but the STX was really good,” said Spc. Samuel Salter, administrative specialist at USASMA with almost four years in the Army. “The training was good because we don’t get to do this much, and it really opens your eyes.”

Both Vidal and Salter said that being around other Soldiers



U.S. Army photo

A new addition to PLDC at Fort Bliss is weapons immersion. Soldiers must have their weapons with them at all times during training, even during PT. This, officials say, has led to a better understanding of safe weapons handling.

who have had combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan was a great help in that the veterans had a lot of good input for the platoon. They also said that being with other non-combat arms Soldiers was a plus because they all learned at the same levels.

“There was a real team effort out in the field, and you got to learn from others in their leadership role, and that just made it better for you,” Salter said.

“The veterans were like our mentors, and they helped us a lot by telling us about things they did over in Iraq,” Vidal said.

To prepare for PLDC, both Vidal and Salter said they were told if they maintained their discipline and listened to details; everything would go smooth. While they successfully completed the new PLDC, LeGloahec said that Soldiers can better prepare themselves for the course by going online and visiting the USASMA Web site at <https://www.bliss.army.mil/usasma/> and then clicking on to the “Training and Doctrine” link.

“Every lesson that is taught is right there on the site. So if a Soldier goes there he or she can see where they might be weak, and then they can download the information, go through it and train up on it,” LeGloahec said. “The student evaluation plan is there as well. It tells them what they are going to be tested on, what the requirements are for passing, everything – it’s all there.”

The only other thing LeGloahec said that Soldiers should know is “you still have to pass the APFT, meet the height and weight standards and be ready for long days, long hours and a great course of instruction. Those SGLs are going to do everything in their power to make sure the Soldier passes. The real key is the Soldier should want to be a success also. We don’t want them to fail. We want them to go back to their units a highly trained leader and to spread that training around.”

As for the Soldier who wrote the editorial, LeGloahec said, “the invitation to go through PLDC again is open.”

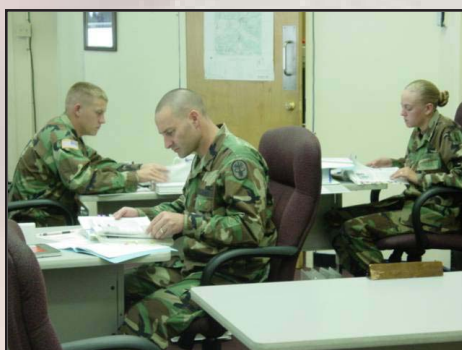
PLDC mission planning

Do you have a Soldier that is scheduled to attend PLDC? Or perhaps you are a Soldier who is slated to attend the course. Here is some important information that might help you succeed. The below course information is taken from the PLDC Course Management Plan, located on the USASMA Web site at <https://www.bliss.army.mil/usasma/>.



Physical requirements

- Pass the APFT
- Negotiate rough terrain under varying climatic conditions
- Conduct, demonstrate and lead physical fitness training
- Walk a minimum of 3200 meters with load carrying equipment in a maximum of three hours
- Lift and carry all required packing list items (OCIE and CTA 50-900) for short distances
- Carry a 50-pound combat load containing mission-essential equipment (helmet, weapon, LCE, and uniform are part of the 50 lbs)
- Occasionally lift and carry fuel, water, ammo, MREs, or sandbags
- Low crawl, high crawl and rush for three to five seconds
- Move over, through and around obstacles
- Carry and fire individually assigned weapon IAW applicable regulatory guidance
- Don Mission-Oriented Protective Posture (MOPP) gear.



Classroom instruction

- Introduction to Army Leadership
- What a leader must BE, Know, DO
- The human dimension role in leader development
- The four direct leadership skills
- The three direct leadership actions
- Maintain discipline
- Conduct developmental counseling
- The Army writing style
- Commandant's orientation
- Introduction to PLDC
- ID historical progression and significant contributions of the NCO
- NCO Evaluation Report
- Sexual Assault
- Risk Management
- After Action Review
- Battle-focused training
- Physical fitness, train the trainer
- Supervise implementation of preventative medicine policies

Note: Some instruction is also accomplished in the field during the rehearsal phase of the STX.



STX

- Map reading
- Combat orders
- Conduct movement
- Occupy an assembly area
- Combat operations
- Land navigation
- Tactical operations reports
- React to possible improvised explosive device
- Casualty evacuation
- After Action Review
- Situational Training Exercise

Note: Much of what the Soldiers do during the STX is taught in the classroom first. Soldiers receive several opportunities to rehearse the field portion of the training before going into the graded portion of the STX. While in the field Soldiers will react to many scenarios to include react to ambush far and near, mounted and unmounted; react to contact; as well as having to deal with civilians on the battlefield.